

Thai News Update: 4-7 May 2018

1. Thai Builder Eyeing 20% Revenue Growth

Source: Business Times ([Link](#))

WHA Corp, Thailand's top industrial estate and warehouse developer, targets a 20 per cent revenue growth this year on higher government spending on infrastructure, foreign investment and a growing e-commerce market, its chief executive said on May 2. The company is also set to benefit from tax incentives that its customers receive on the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) project in Thailand's industrial east, chief executive Jareeporn Jarukornsakul told Reuters in an interview. The US\$45 billion project near the Gulf of Thailand, aimed at attracting high-tech investment, is a centrepiece of the Thai junta's policy to boost growth and includes building high-speed trains and airports. WHA targets land sales of 1,400 rai (224 ha) this year and expects more next year as investment in the EEC starts. Most of its industrial estates are located in EEC provinces where investors qualify for incentives. The company, which also operates an industrial estate in Vietnam, is studying expansion in Myanmar, the CEO said, as it was an "interesting" market due to its large population

2. Govt In Race Against Time To Update Data Privacy Law

Source: The Nation ([Link](#))

Experts call for quick action amid growing ecommerce, data breach fears and upcoming tough new EU legislation. Thailand needs to quickly enact data privacy legislation as the country moves ahead with the digital economy and society platforms, according to legal and other experts. The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) is currently revising a 10-year-old draft of the proposed law to catch up with the latest challenges as evidenced by the recent personal data leak fears involving telecom operator TrueMoveH. It is feared that the security of ID-card and other personal data of more than 10,000 Thai customers might have been compromised. Bhumee Bhumiratana, a researcher and expert on cybersecurity, said MDES was expected to finalise the new draft for Cabinet approval and enactment by the National Legislative Assembly by the end of this year, even though the European Union's (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law is due to be effective from May 25 this year. The GDPR is said to be the world's new legal

standard on data privacy and related regulations with its enforcement affecting other countries, including Thailand, as the personal data of all EU citizens will be protected under the new EU law with binding conditions for companies with EU customers. Paiboon Amonpinyokeat, a cyber law expert, said the MDES will have to update the new draft law to cover data leaks as happened recently in the TrueMoveH case so that preventive and remedial measures could be taken in the future.

3. Alibaba Brings Focus On Tech-Based Education Curriculum

Source: The Nation ([Link](#))

Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba's Bt11-billion promised investment in Thailand have prompted the country's higher education institutes to step up their technology and related curriculum in preparation for a rising demand for digital skills. Suchatchavee Suwansawas, rector of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, said Jack Ma's larger presence here via the Alibaba e-commerce, payment, logistics, and tourism projects had further boosted Thai people's awareness of digital technology, social media, e-commerce and related fields. Universities in Thailand are now set to produce more graduates in digital technology, "big data" and artificial intelligence (AI), he said. Ek Pattarathanakul, a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Accountancy, said Thai enterprises needed to adapt and learn new things from the Alibaba projects in Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC). Another option would be to focus on specific and niche market segments to avoid direct competition with the giant e-commerce and related platforms, he said. Ek said Thai students needed to take new courses such as digital branding so that they understand the new landscape in the digital economy and society. Meanwhile, graduates with soft skills such as those concerning emotions, ethics and social media will also be sought after by the labour market. Saowaraj Ratanakamfu of the Thailand Development Research Institute said the biggest challenge in accommodating Alibaba's investment projects in this country lay in the availability of workers with digital and related skills. This takes on increased importance with Thailand serving as a regional hub for the Chinese giant.

4. Cash-Rich Thai Explorer Eyes Assets Worth Up To US\$1b

Source: The Star ([Link](#))

Thailand's PTT Exploration & Production Pcl is ready to shell out as much as \$1 billion on an overseas petroleum asset this year, and possibly more, as it tries to prop up growth amid falling reserves. The upstream unit of state-controlled PTT Pcl is in talks to purchase a stake in oil, natural gas or liquefied natural gas assets in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, Chief Executive Officer Somporn Vongvuthipornchai said in an interview Thursday in Bangkok. One or more deals could be finalized this year, he said. PTT E&P, which has amassed \$5 billion in cash and marketable securities, is on the hunt for deals after crude's slump shook up the industry. While the company weathered the downturn by cutting costs and investments, it hasn't revived reserves, which have dropped every year since a peak of about 1.1 billion barrels in 2009. Its 631 million barrels of proved reserves are enough to last five years at current production rates. PTT E&P will favor projects in Southeast Asia, but is also looking in the Middle East where low production costs could help withstand price volatility, according to Somporn. Global benchmark Brent crude reached a nadir below \$30 in 2016 and last month exceeded \$75. The company targets sales volume of about 300,000 barrels of oil equivalent a day this year, similar to the levels in 2017. It has set aside \$15 billion for investments over the next five years, and is seeking opportunities in LNG plants, power generation, battery storage and decommissioning old wells.

5. Foreigners Snapping Up Bangkok Luxury Condos

Source: The Straits Times ([Link](#))

In chic central Bangkok, a foreign buying binge is fuelling a red-hot market for ultra-luxury real estate. With the economy still recovering from a 2014 slowdown, household debt makes it tough for the average Thai to qualify for a home loan, so firms like Sansiri and Country Group Development are selling luxury units to foreigners instead. Real estate firm Colliers International Group's general manager for Thailand, Mr Ratchaphum Jongpakdee, said: "Developers are having problems selling to locals. But they have no problem selling to foreigners." Buyers definitely get more bang for their buck in Bangkok than in Hong Kong, in terms of square footage and bathroom fixtures, for example. But what is surprising is that, even though condo prices in the centre of the Thai capital have doubled in the last five years, they are still cheaper than those in cities like

Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur or Ho Chi Minh City, said real estate advisers. The price gap could be set to close, though. Once a niche tourism destination for backpackers, Bangkok in 2016 surpassed London to become the world's most visited city, hosting 19 million overnight travellers, about two for every resident. The boom has put the city on the map for investors, especially mainland Chinese, who are coming in droves. Last year, land prices in the city centre jumped a record 30 per cent, with foreign investors making up almost a quarter of the capital's high-end property sales, said commercial real estate firm CBRE Group.

6. Government To Return Doi Suthep Housing Land Plot To Park

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

The government agreed on May 6 to end the controversial housing project in the foothills of Doi Suthep by returning the area to the park. Prime Minister's Office Minister Suvaphan Tanyuvardhana said after a meeting with local leaders at Government Complex in Chiang Mai they had reached an agreement on the future of the housing project built for the Administrative Office of Appeal Region 5 in Mae Rim district. The area where 45 houses and nine condominiums are being built will no longer be zoned for residential use, he said, adding that the plot will eventually be returned to its original owner, Doi Suthep-Pui National Park. The minister called for patience from local people on the fate of the housing project. "We have to find a solution step by step," he said. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha set the tone for the meeting when he said on his weekly TV address on May 4 that he would not allow anyone to live in the controversy-plagued area.

7. PM Takes Huge Funds Vow To Buri Ram

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

All eyes are on the mobile cabinet meeting starting May 7 in Buri Ram, with the government set to announce an injection of more than 20 billion baht into the province and nearby areas amid skepticism that the move is politically motivated. According to the government sources, at least 21 development projects worth about 20.7 billion baht for Buri Ram and lower Northeastern provinces will be proposed for approval at the cabinet meeting on May 8. The projects include infrastructure development worth 11.8 billion baht, improvement to water management worth 3.4

billion baht, improving peoples' quality of life worth 3.6 billion baht, promoting border trade and investment worth 1.4 billion baht and tourism development worth about 500 million baht. Buri Ram airport will also see a new terminal built and its runways expanded to accommodate larger aircraft and increased tourism brought by the MotoGP races, a global motorcycle racing championship which Thailand will host between 2018 and 2020 at Buri Ram's Chang International Circuit developed by Mr Newin.

8. Foreign Labour Cap Set At 20% Under New Law

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

A new law to take effect on July 1 will cap the number of migrant workers which companies and industries can hire at 20% to protect Thai labourers as the government moves to free up skill shortages in some areas while also ensuring foreigners do not force Thais out of work. The act on the management of migrant labour, passed by the National Legislative Assembly in April, will cover all migrant labourers no matter whether they are hired in Thailand under a government MoU or not. The bill will fix the number of foreign employees at 20% in the industry and services sector. This is to ensure Thai labourers remain relevant in these occupations, a source from the Ministry of Labour said. Section 11 of the act says the Department of Employment will compile job-seeking registration from all Thai nationals who wish to work. Employers who wish to employ foreign workers despite the availability of Thai jobseekers who are capable of doing the same job must cap their foreign employment at only 20% of total staff. If the number of workers exceeds five, special fees will be levied if firms wish to exceed the 20% limit. No detail was available on the types of jobs or the rate of the fees. The Office of the Management of Foreign Workers' Employment Fund will work with various labour agencies and the private sector on the fee. The fund will continue to decide which jobs must be exclusive to Thais, and which jobs can be performed by both domestic and foreign labour.